

DIWALI:

(Also called Deepavali) A festival of lights for Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains

Diwali, known as the Festival of Lights, is a major Indian festival and symbolizes the victory of good over evil, with lamps, candles, and fireworks as signs of joy and hope for humanity. It also is seen as a celebration of the inner light within one's true nature that connects us with ultimate reality.

Originally known by the Sanskrit word Deepavali, meaning "a row of lights," the name was popularly modified to Diwali, especially in northern India.

Celebrations focus on lights and lamps, particularly traditional deepa or diya (earthen lamps filled with mustard oil or clarified butter [ghee]).

Diwali is celebrated for five consecutive days at the end of the Hindu month of Ashwayuja (in October or November, according to the Gregorian calendar). On the day of Diwali, celebrants wear new clothes, share sweets and snacks, and light fireworks.

In 2022, Diwali begins on October 24.

Multiple reasons to celebrate:

Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama, with his wife Sita, to Ayodhya after a fourteen-year exile and war in which Rama killed the demon king Ravana (who had kidnapped Sita). It is believed that people lit oil lamps along the way to light up the moonless night and guide their new king and queen home.

It also commemorates the killing of the evil demon Narakasura by Lord Krishna's wife Satyabhama. In another version, the demon was killed by Lord Krishna himself. Bathing with oils re-enacts Krishna's being massaged and anointed with oils following his victory.



It is also a celebration of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lamps are lit to guide her to people's houses, and doors and windows are left open to allow her to enter. Because of this association with wealth, many businesses begin their fiscal years on Diwali and open new account books during the festival.

Sikhs celebrate Diwali because it marks the day when the foundation stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, Sikhs' holiest shrine, was laid in 1588 C.E., and also because it commemorates the release of the sixth Sikh guru, Har Gobind Singh (1595 – 1644 C.E.), from prison in 1619 C.E.

Jains mark Diwali as the day when Lord Mahavira (also known as Vardhaman; 599 – 527 B.C.E.), the last of the Tirthankaras (“fordmakers”) and the founder of Jainism, attained Moksha (Nirvana, or eternal bliss). It also marks the beginning of the Jain year. There is a note of asceticism in all Jain rituals, and the celebration of Diwali is no exception. The Jains celebrate Diwali for three days, fasting and chanting the Uttaradhyayana Sutra, which contain the final pravachans (sermons) of Lord Mahavira.

The Five Days of Diwali

Diwali is celebrated over five days in most of North India. All the days except Diwali are named using the designation in the Indian calendar.

- 1) **Dhan-trayodashi or Dhan teras:** Dhan means “wealth” and Trayodashi means “13th day.” Thus this day falls on the 13th day of the second half of the lunar month, and is an auspicious day for shopping.
- 2) **Naraka Chaturdasi:** Chaturdasi is the fourteenth day, on which the demon Narakasura was killed by Krishna. In south India, this is the actual day of festivities. Children often light firecrackers to herald the demon’s defeat, and many families take the opportunity to eat elaborate meals and visit friends. In the evening, lamps are again lit and the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped and offered special dishes.
- 3) **Diwali:** The actual day of Diwali is celebrated on the third day of the festival, when the moon completely wanes and total darkness sets in the night sky.
- 4) **Govardhan Puja, also called Annakut,** is celebrated as the day that Lord Krishna defeated Indra, the god of thunder and rain. For Annakut a mountain of food is decorated, symbolizing the mountain that was lifted by Lord Krishna to prevent its villages and cattle from being flooded. Men present gifts to their wives on this day.
- 5) **Bhayiduj (also Bhayyaduj, Bhaubeej or Bhayitika):** On this day, brothers and sisters meet to express their love and affection for each other. Sisters ask the gods for their brothers’ long and successful lives and prepare delicacies for their siblings, and brothers give presents to their sisters.



Diwali is celebrated in many parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Republic of Suriname, Canada, Guyana, Mauritius, India, Fiji, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, much of Africa, and the United States.